

# **HASTINGS & ST. LEONARDS SOCIETY**

*Promoting Our Heritage and Civic Pride*

Website: [www.hastingsandstleonardssociety.org.uk](http://www.hastingsandstleonardssociety.org.uk)

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**Newsletter: Issue 20 (9<sup>th</sup> October 2020)**

## **Looking Ahead to 2021 – with optimism!**

This newsletter comes to you when we should have been starting a busy and exiting 'Hastings Week', culminating on Saturday 17 October with the National Town Criers Championship and the Bonfire with its grand procession and fireworks display. But the continuing Covid-19 pandemic forced Hastings Borough Council to abandon putting together a 'Hastings Week' programme of events for this year a few months ago. Let us hope normality will have returned in 2021, so that our extensive local annual programme of events can go ahead. And, indeed, the Hastings & St. Leonards Society committee is continuing to make plans for events and projects regardless of the Covid-19 crisis.

### **No Subscription Fees in 2021 Society Year for Existing Members**

Thanks to all members who took part in our e-mail AGM last month, especially to those proposers and seconders for the items that required this support. The Notes from the AGM were circulated to all paid-up members mid-September.

One of the items on the Agenda was for the annual subscription fee for the 2021 Society Year to be waived for existing members. This action was proposed because the Society has been unable to offer the usual meetings, events and outings programme for our members during 2020, due to the enforced restrictions caused by Covid-19. There were no objections to this proposal, so all paid-up members for 2020 will have their annual memberships renewed on 1 January 2021 for free.

We are also hoping to recruit new members so that we can raise funds for local heritage projects and publications, and also continue to support the National Town Criers Championship by way of

providing the prize money (this was £200 in 2018 and 2019, and would have been repeated in 2020 if the event could have gone ahead). Please spread the word. Fees for new members are: Individual: £6; Joint (2 persons at same address) £10; Student £5; Group membership rate on application.

### HBC Local Plan Survey

Hastings Borough Council recently held an on-line survey as part of the scheme to draw up a new 'Local Plan' for the Borough over the next 25 years. It is likely that many of our members took part in the survey and have seen the Council's recently published report. However, for those who have not seen the report, the main points are given here:

Thank you to all of you who responded to our recent local plan survey. We had over 1200 responses which is fantastic and will help us to shape the new Local Plan for Hastings for the next 25 years. It is likely that many of our members took part in the survey and have seen the report HBC recently published. However, for those who have not seen the report, an extract is given here:

We asked you to let us know what your top three priorities would be for us to focus on out of a choice of five plus any other ideas you had.

**What did you tell us? You said the priorities for you were:**

**Top priority - 'Achieve and sustain a thriving economy and create new job opportunities'** 454 respondents had this as their number 1 and a further 483 as either their second or third priority.

**Second priority - 'Improve public health and wellbeing'** 291 respondents had this as their number one with another 443 as their second or third priority.

**Third priority - 'Protect and celebrate the town's natural and historic environment'**. 197 respondents had this as their highest priority and a further 518 as their second or third priority.

**Fourth priority - 'Deliver homes that people can access and want in well-designed neighbourhoods'** 137 respondents had this as their highest priority with a further 406 as their second or third priority.

**Fifth priority - 'Address climate change and meet our zero carbon ambitions'** 156 respondents as this as their number one with 285 having it as their second or third priority.

**All the themes will be considered as part of the new Local Plan but we will focus on those you have said are your priorities.**

**Others** – We had 86 respondents having different ideas as their number 1 priority and a further 149 with other suggestions as their second or third priorities. We will look at these in more detail as we progress the Plan. Some of these were not related to the Local Plan but will be useful for looking at how we can improve council services or may be passed on to those organisations responsible for the issues raised.

### **What happens next?**

This early feedback is being used along with input from statutory agencies and organisations that we must consult to draw together the first draft of the new Local Plan. This first draft will go out for wider public consultation later this year and will be published on the Council website and made available for further comment.

In the new year we hope to run virtual workshops that you can join. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic, we are not currently planning to hold any physical meetings or displays as we have in the past, but our website will have all the information you need to get involved and further updates will be issued with more details nearer the time.

### **Convent of the Holy Child**

We are still unable to schedule any of our popular Open Meetings, at which topics concerning local heritage and other civic matters are discussed. As soon as it is considered safe to do so, and government regulations permit, we will arrange a meeting at the usual White Rock Hotel venue. We invite suggestions for the Agenda.

One item likely to be on the Agenda for the next Open Meeting is the future of the 'Convent of the Holy Child Jesus and Estate'. Since we mentioned the inquiry we had on this matter, with the reply provided by our member Lynn Gausden, there has been further correspondence. Burtons' St. Leonards Society has been engaged in trying to resolve the uncertainty about the future of the Chapel and Estate for a number of years, and the Society's Chair, Christopher Maxwell-Stewart (also a H & St. L Society member) has provided his overview of the matter. We have posted this on our website.

## Pelham Arcade and Crescent

Remarks are often heard about the shabby appearance of the front of Pelham Parade and Crescent, which is one of the borough's prime local heritage sites. Refuse bins and a boarded-up shop have long been eyesores at this location opposite Hastings seafront. It is now two years since representatives of H & St. L Society met with HBC officers on-site to discuss a remedy for this problem and to determine where to position the Local Heritage Information Board the Society has designed, with the support of HBC, as part of the Pelham Arcade restoration project that HBC had undertaken with guidance from Historic England. Still no progress with improving the appearance of the location. However, we slog on and have had a recent update from Jane Stephen at HBC. Rather disappointing news in this:

In the early part of this year, I was heavily involved in trying to agree a package of works to complete the Pelham Arcade scheme. The remaining properties that we have left to deal with are likely to be the most challenging to bring into the scheme, and it is likely to take a concerted and prolonged effort on the part of the Council to complete the full scheme. I was working very closely with our project partners to pull together and agree a strategy on moving forward.

We then temporarily paused the Pelham Arcade restoration scheme, during the height of the Covid-19 epidemic, between March and the end of June 2020. By the time that we started up again, the financial landscape for funding such regeneration projects had completely changed, and the future of the project was potentially under threat. I have been working very hard, over the past few months, to try to keep the scheme afloat, and to identify alternative funding mechanisms to enable us to continue with the restoration work. This has necessarily taken me away from the general day-to-day management of the project. In particular, I have been working closely with our funding partners at Historic England to try to find a way of taking the major road/roof repair project for Pelham Arcade and Crescent forward. This work is likely to continue to occupy most of my Pelham time (one day per week) over the next few months. This means that I cannot currently give priority to the information board project, but I will try to get back to it as soon as possible.

Regarding the removal of the commercial bins from outside 12 Pelham Arcade and the erection of your sign board, Jane has held a discussion with colleagues at HBC and the current view is:

...operationally the best alternative siting for the bins was still on the north side of the seafront road, but up against the front edge of the pavement, rather than against the painted render wall of 12 Pelham Arcade. This site would be readily accessible to the businesses in the Arcade; there is a conveniently located loading bay just adjacent, where the bin wagons can pull up to collect the refuse. This option would leave the wall of 12 Pelham Arcade open to view and potentially available as a site for your sign board (either attached to the wall or free-standing on feet).

Perhaps we will have to settle for that, although it is certainly not an ideal solution. The Society has made one small contribution to improving the appearance of this important heritage locality, though, as we recently renovated the blue plaque to the influential architect, George Devey, at 12 Pelham Crescent.

### West Hill (Hastings) Information Poster

Our West Hill local heritage research project has ended, and the final work on this was to provide HBC with details for an A1 board for inserting into the existing Information Board located close to the café and top station of the 'lift'. This replaces the West Hill history poster that has been on display for many years now, but is not accurate. The new poster has a map of the area with points of interest numbered and short details for each of these. Look out for it soon. However, the Information Board has been vandalised, so that needs attention before the new board is inserted.

### Town Deal Board

Before activities were severely curtailed by the pandemic, HBC set up a Town Deal Board. The purpose of this is to develop a Town Investment Plan, so that a Town Deal can be agreed with the Government as part of the funding scheme for selected towns. A meeting was held on 17 September, and our committee member and Town Centre manager, John Bownas, was in attendance. He reported back to us that "the content was rather lightweight". Details of the Town Deal initiative are on HBC website:  
[www.hastings.gov.uk/townddeal](http://www.hastings.gov.uk/townddeal)

Hastings & St. Leonards Society Committee

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